

Ministerial Response to Recommendations made in the Fifth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the State's Capacity to provide support for victims of Domestic Violence and Family Conflicts (with specific focus on the availability of support mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Recommendation A:

Implementation of Data Drives – The present data collection practices could be improved and the overall process can be re-evaluated. For example, how interviewers are trained to ask questions about intimate partner violence, language and wording are areas where improvements are needed. Additionally, inclusion of more qualitative studies which examine how domestic and intimate partner violence is experienced in various socio-economic and cultural contexts and situations. Specific details highlighting these criteria can assist researchers and policy makers in creating ‘culture specific’ prevention and intervention strategies. This can be considered a medium-term activity for all agencies involved in data collection.

Response:

The Ministry of Planning and Development supports this recommendation and would like to note that improvement in the data collection practices requires firstly an assessment of all data sources currently available. Some sources of data will be administrative in nature; other potential sources of data will likely require periodic household-based surveys. An approach to improvement in the data collection practices of Trinidad and Tobago should involve those international agencies (UN family of organizations - UNFPA, UN Women etc.) with already existing expertise in undertaking sensitive surveys on domestic violence and any other methods of data collection. There also needs to be a meeting of national stakeholders to identify the type of data specifically needed for Trinidad and Tobago which may differ from standard international domestic violence data and indicators.

Recommendation B:

Within six (6) months of the presentation of this Report, there should be inclusion of additional data fields for the provision of more comprehensive and holistic information specifically by the TTPS. Data on recidivism for DV offenders, migrants (in light of the country's growing migrant population) and LGBTQI+ communities is especially important. Better data about these groups,

especially about the proportion of these groups being affected is important as this can help service providers meet their specific needs through prevention and intervention strategies.

Response:

Improvements and additions to data collected by the TTPS should be done with local stakeholder engagement and with the consultation of UN Agencies that will be aware of international best practice approaches to the collection and storage of domestic violence administrative data collected by law enforcement agencies. If a holistic and comprehensive system of data collection by the TTPS is to be implemented, a period of six (6) months would appear to be ambitious. If the approach to gathering data is to be comprehensive, adheres to international standards and complies with general ethical protocols to gathering such data, this will take a minimum period of two (2) years.

Recommendation C:

The Committee notes a general recommendation made by several stakeholders for a standardized procedure for proper intake, monitoring, evaluating, discharge and follow-up data for offenders and survivors as this will play a major role in improving the quality of DV statistics available.

Response:

The Ministry agrees with the Recommendation for the standardization of procedures for the development of an efficient process that would support the collection of the relevant data required from future DV cases; monitoring of the DV victims/survivors to determine whether their situation/circumstance has improved or degenerated subsequent to making a report; and monitoring of offenders, including the collection of discharge and post discharge follow up data as included in Report.

Further, it is suggested that key performance indicators be included in all monitoring processes that are to be developed. The existence of key performance indicators will support the collection of the relevant data required to track DV cases, and allow for stakeholders in the process to align their data collection mechanisms to support the collection and tracking of these indicators.

Therefore, the Ministry is of the view that its implementation will support the relevance, credibility, and accuracy of the data collection and management on DV, and will improve the collection of more and varied data/information to inform decision-making.

Recommendation D:

By the next fiscal year (2023/2024) a Gender Based Violence Consolidated Database should be established by the Central Statistical Office (CSO). This should be a public database (functional and easy to navigate) that is standardized and receives all data from various agencies. While there may still be an issue of underreporting DV – a standardized National Database can provide reliable data that will have the potential for re-researchers, policy makers and related agencies in creating more attuned prevention and intervention strategies.

Response:

The CSO has the responsibility to coordinate the National Statistical System and is very much interested in improving the statistical capacity to collect, process, store and disseminate additional data on women, youth, children and other vulnerable groups in society. However, for a comprehensive and high-quality Gender Based Violence Consolidated Database to be established:

- further consultation is required to resolve issues surrounding Recommendations A and B;
- data collection and communication protocols along with formal agreements need to be established between the CSO and other relevant agencies such as the TTPS to obtain Administrative data;
- more resources are required to enhance the Social Statistics Unit; and
- a digital portal also needs to be established with protocols for receiving and accessing data. The Ministry of Digital Transformation can be an instrumental partner in enabling its achievement.

Recommendation E:

Stronger relationships to be established between local police agencies and the communities they serve. Strengthening of community bonds is important with law enforcement to encourage reporting especially for the benefit of those who may have some skepticism concerning the effectiveness of police. Nurturing of community relationships with Police agencies can be considered a short-term activity (done quarterly) that can contribute to long term impacts. These relationships can be fostered through the establishment of mentorship programmes and community awareness drives.

Response:

The Ministry of Planning and Development endorses this recommendation.

Recommendation F:

Re-training specifically for staff of the TTPS Gender Based Violence Unit (and by ex-tension the wider Police Academy) to receive specialized training on serving the LGBTQI+ community. Sensitivity and Diversity training should be available year round and should be available as ‘refresher courses’ at the police academy.

Response:

The Ministry of Planning and Development has no additional comments on this matter.

Recommendation G:

Additionally, increased human resource capacity needed especially for first responders. Retraining and empowering first responders to appropriately receive and respond to DV can further encourage victims and survivors to be more open about their abuse, thus helping provide more reliable and accurate data through reporting. Retraining and empowerment can be facilitated in-house at respective agencies and done at most on a quarterly basis.

Response:

The Ministry of Planning and Development has no additional comments on this matter.

Recommendation H:

The Committee acknowledges and endorses the plan of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to establish a Vulnerability Registry, which aims to identify the vulnerability status of all households in Trinidad and Tobago. The Registry will be based on reports provided by the TTPS, the OPM, the MOE, state agencies and other NGOs. Through this registry, early intervention strategies could be implemented for families in need. It is expected that this registry can be developed one year after the presentation of this report.

Response:

The Ministry of Planning and Development has no additional comments on this matter.